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ABSTRACT

School-based management (SBM) varies from school to school but generally involves giving educators, parents, and community members increased responsibility over educational decision making. The "Schools and Staffing Survey" provides information on where decisions are made for three SBM areas: establishing curriculum, hiring new full-time teachers, and setting discipline policy. The 1987-88 School Administrator Questionnaire collected information from 8,580 public school principals on these questions nationwide. Results of the survey showed that the principals believed: school district personnel were most likely to establish curriculum; principals had the most responsibility for hiring teachers; and the school district or principal was most likely to set discipline policy. Principals said that school districts in large urban areas exercise greater decision-making control than those in suburbs or rural areas. In general, the larger the urban area in which the school was located, the less control principals reported they had. In conclusion, the analysis suggests that much decision making takes place at the district level, though principals have considerable influence over hiring teachers; but that studies of SBM need to take into account the types of communities in which schools are located. (JPT)

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Who Runs the Schools? The Principal's View

School-based management (SBM) is often in the news. In practice, SBM varies from school to school, but generally it gives increased budgeting, curriculum, and staffing responsibilities to principals and teachers or to parents and community members in conjunction with school staff. The influence each group has varies from school to school, but the goal remains the same: to improve children's schooling.

Implicit in this call for greater school-level influence is the belief that those closest to the children—principals, teachers, parents, and community members—know best what is needed to improve their schools. The purpose of this report is to examine where decision making now occurs.

The *Schools and Staffing Survey* (SASS) provides information on where decisions are made for three SBM areas: establishing curriculum, hiring new full-time teachers, and setting discipline policy. The 1987-88 School Administrator Questionnaire collected information from 8,580 public school principals across the country.

Principals were asked how much they thought the school district, principal, and teachers actually influenced decisions on establishing curriculum, hiring new full-time teachers, and setting discipline policy. The principals' answers are categorized according to which of the three groups—district, principal, or teachers—they believed most influenced these decisions.

The data provided are principals' reports of conditions and are not based on independent observations of actual decision making. Also, many differences observed between different community types may be due to district and school sizes, both of which tend to be larger in large cities.

Who Decides?

Public school principals painted a picture in which they and the school district considerably influence curriculum, hiring teachers, and setting discipline policy. They believed

- School district personnel were most likely to establish curriculum;
- Principals had the greatest responsibility for hiring new full-time teachers; and
- The school district or the principal was most likely to set discipline policy.

Table 1.—Principals' views on who has the most influence over selected school decisions

Staff most responsible	Type of school decision: Establishing curriculum	Hiring new full-time teachers	Setting discipline policy
	(Percentage of principals responding)		
Total	100	100	100
School district	33	28	24
Teachers	12	1	1
Principals	11	49	23
Principals & teachers	19	2	18
District & teachers	3	0	0
District & principal	6	18	15
All three	15	2	17

NOTE: Figures may not total 100 because of rounding.

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Teachers, on the other hand, were not seen having primary responsibility over any of these areas. Only 12 percent of principals thought teachers were primarily responsible for establishing curriculum, and only 1 percent said teachers had primary responsibility for hiring new teachers or setting discipline policy.

Establishing Curriculum

Establishing curriculum was most often viewed as a school district reponsibility.

- 33 percent of principals said that the school district was most likely to be responsible for establishing curriculum;
- 19 percent believed teachers and principals were equally responsible for this area; and
- 15 percent said all three—district, principals, and teachers—were equally responsible.

Hiring New Full-Time Teachers

School principals were most likely to report they have primary responsibility for hiring new full-time teachers.

- 49 percent said school principals were most likely to have primary responsibility for this area;
- 28 percent said school district personnel were primarily responsible; and
- 18 percent said principals and the school district were equally responsible.

Teachers were seen having little primary responsibility for hiring new colleagues.

Setting Discipline Policy

School principals were equally likely to report they and the school district personnel were most responsible for decisions on discipline policy.

- 24 percent reported the school district was most responsible, and 23 percent reported the school principal was most responsible.

Again, teachers were not seen having primary responsibility for setting policy, but working with the principals (18 percent) or with the principals and district (17 percent).

Community Type

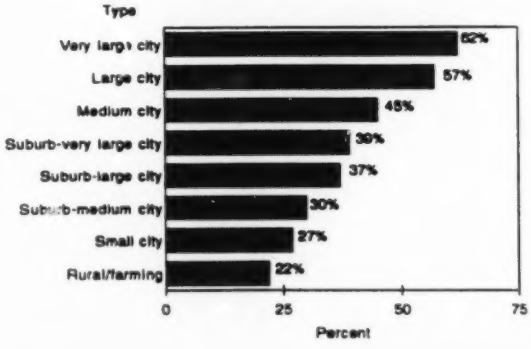
The type of community in which their schools were located influenced the control school principals believed they and their teachers had over decisions. Big city schools are more likely to be part of large school districts that exercise central control over decisions than are schools in small towns or rural areas. Principals in big cities thought school districts exercised greater control than did their colleagues in suburbs or small towns.

School principals viewed school district staff in very large cities as being firmly in control.

- 62 percent in very large cities said districts had the most influence over establishing curriculum;
- 61 percent said districts had the most influence on hiring new full-time teachers; and
- 40 percent said districts had the most influence on setting discipline policy.

Only a small minority of school principals in very large cities believed they alone (4 percent), their teachers (5 percent), or they and their teachers (9 percent) were primarily responsible for making decisions on curriculum. They reported somewhat more control over hiring teachers and setting discipline policy, but the district still was the primary influence.

Figure 1.—Percentage of principals agreeing that the school district has the most influence over establishing curriculum



Schools and Staffing Survey

The situation in small cities and towns, where schools are less likely to be part of a school district with a large centralized bureaucracy, is much different.

- 27 percent of principals in small cities and towns said districts had the most influence over establishing curriculum;
- 22 percent said districts had the most influence on hiring new full-time teachers; and
- 22 percent said districts had the most influence on setting discipline policy.

Principals in small towns and cities are much more likely to report they or their teachers are responsible for decisions about curriculum, hiring, and discipline.

- Nearly half report they and their teachers have the most influence over establishing curriculum (13 percent say they have, 14 percent report their teachers have, and 21 percent believe they and their teachers are equally responsible).
- Over half (53 percent) report they have the most influence over hiring new full-time teachers.
- Nearly half report they and their teachers have the most influence over setting discipline policy (26 percent say they have, 20 percent believe they and their teachers are equally responsible, and a tiny minority—2 percent—report teachers are primarily responsible).

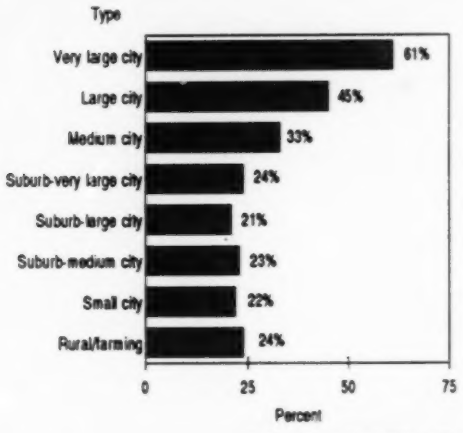
In general, the larger the city in which the school is located, the less the amount of control reported by school principals.

Table 2.—Principals' views on who has the most influence over establishing curriculum, hiring full-time teachers, and setting discipline policy, by type of decision and community

Community type	Entity said to have the most influence							
	School district	Teachers	Principal	Teachers & principal	District & teachers	District & principal	All three	Total
	(Percent)							
Establishing Curriculum								
Total	33	12	11	19	3	6	15	100
Very large city	62	5	4	9	2	7	12	100
Large city	57	6	4	10	4	6	12	100
Medium city	45	11	7	11	4	5	17	100
Suburb of very large city	39	14	10	16	4	5	13	100
Suburb of large city	37	12	7	18	4	5	17	100
Suburb of medium city	30	11	10	21	3	6	19	100
Small city or town	27	14	13	21	3	7	16	100
Rural/farming	22	13	16	25	2	7	15	100
Hiring new full-time teachers								
Total	28	1	49	2	0	18	2	100
Very large city	61	—	20	1	—	10	7	100
Large city	45	1	32	2	1	16	3	100
Medium city	33	1	46	3	—	15	2	100
Suburb of very large city	24	—	56	2	—	16	1	100
Suburb of large city	21	0	57	3	—	18	2	100
Suburb of medium city	23	1	54	2	—	17	3	100
Small city or town	22	1	53	2	—	20	2	100
Rural/farming	24	0	52	2	0	20	2	100
Setting discipline policy								
Total	25	1	23	18	0	15	17	100
Very large city	40	2	15	13	1	14	15	100
Large city	42	1	13	15	1	13	15	100
Medium city	29	1	18	19	1	14	18	100
Suburb of very large city	26	2	20	19	—	17	16	100
Suburb of large city	22	1	26	19	—	14	18	100
Suburb of medium city	24	—	23	20	—	15	17	100
Small city or town	22	2	26	20	0	14	17	100
Rural/farming	18	1	27	18	0	18	17	100

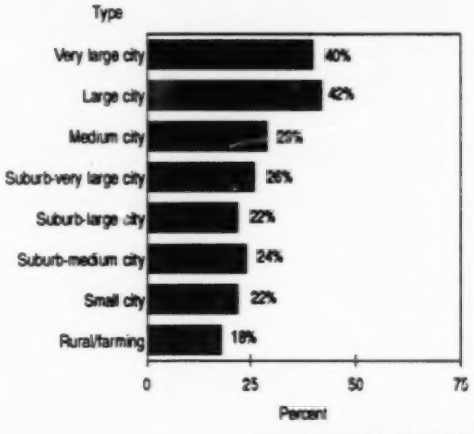
NOTES: (1) Figures may not total 100 because of rounding. (2) The total contains a small number of schools on military bases or Indian reservations. There were too few of these schools to include them as separate categories. (3) Very large cities are those with over 500,000 people, large cities have 100,000 to 500,000 people, medium cities have 50,000 to 100,000 people, and small cities and towns have fewer than 50,000 people and in addition are not suburbs of larger cities. (4) — indicates that there were too few cases for analysis.

Figure 2.—Percentage of principals agreeing that the school district has the most influence over hiring new full-time teachers



Schools and Staffing Survey

Figure 3.—Percentage of principals agreeing that the school district has the most influence over setting discipline policy



Schools and Staffing Survey

Conclusions

These analyses suggest much decision making takes place at the school district level, although school principals have a considerable influence over hiring teachers. Nevertheless, studies of school-based management need to take into account the types of communities in which schools are located: school personnel in smaller communities may already have a great deal of control over curriculum, hiring, and discipline.

Notes: (1) This report was prepared by Judith Anderson, Office of Research of the U.S. Department of Education, to provide background information for an Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development report on *The Effectiveness of Schooling and of Education Resource Management*. If you have comments on this *Research Report*, please send them to the Office of Research, OERI, U.S. Department of Education, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW, Room 610e, Washington, DC 20208. (2) Tables of standard errors and numbers of cases are available in a separate report. Write to the address above to obtain this report.

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